

Captain Francis Watlington House
322 Duval Street
Key West
Monroe County
Florida

HABS No. FLA-192

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. FL-192

CAPTAIN FRANCIS WATLINGTON HOUSE

Location: 322 Duval Street, Key West, Monroe County, Florida.

USGS Key West Quadrangle, Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 17.418540.2715970.

Present Owner
and Occupant: Mr. Earl Johnson

Significance: Traditionally called the oldest house in Key West, this building is said to have been built as early as 1825 and moved by Richard Cussans from Whitehead Street to its present location in 1832. Later, it became the home of Captain Watlington and has remained in his family until this date.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Said to have been 1825.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: John W. Simonton sold all of Lot 1, Square 25, to Thomas A. Townsend and Asa F. Tift in 1834 (Deed Book B, p. 96). No record has been found of Cussans' purchase of part of this lot. In 1839, Richard W. Cussans sold to William M. Wall his house and lot, part of Lot 1, Square 25, consisting of 80' on Duval, beginning on the line dividing Lot 1 and Lot 2, and running 197' 9" deep. These are the present dimensions of the property (Deed Book C, pp. 62, 63). The house was moved to its present location in 1832. Wall sold to Nicholas D. Herder in 1842 (Deed Book C, pp. 213, 215). Herder retained the property until 1869, when it was deeded to Emeling Watlington (Deed Book G, p. 441). It has remained in the Watlington family since that date.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: One legend is that this house was built by the United States Government as quarters for naval officers of Commodore David Porter's Anti-Pirate Squadron. However, in an issue of The Key West Advertiser of 1829, Cussand placed an ad as being a carpenter and joiner (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., microfilm copy in Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida). The County records show that in 1829, Cussans owned property on Whitehead Street.

5. Original plans and construction: None.
6. Alterations and additions: A number of alterations have occurred through the years, but no records of these are known and alterations are of no great importance.

The three dormer windows on the street or front side of the house have been modified. Each dormer is now unequal in size. Originally, the center dormer was double the width of the two end dormers; and the two end dormers were of equal size.

On the first floor, an office was built for Captain Watlington by enclosing part of the back porch and adding a bay to the side. A small outside porch provided private entrance to the office from the street. Later, the other end of the porch was enclosed. A second porch (screened) was later added on the other side.

Originally the front porch rail had rectangular ballusters, but these have been replaced by simple cross supports.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Captain Watlington, whose home was in this house, was one of the early settlers and a prominent figure in maritime activities. A fine pilot, he was in command of not only merchant ships but wrecking vessels as well.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Monroe County Court House Records and Deed Books, County Clerk's Office, Key West, Florida.

U.S. Census, Monroe County 1839-1880; Monroe County Tax Rolls 1845-1860, 1866-1876, Microfilm Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Florida.

2. Secondary and published sources:

American Guide Series, A Guide to Key West, Hastings House, New York, second edition, 1949, p. 83.

Browne, Jefferson, Key West: The Old and the New, The Record Company, St. Augustine, Florida. 1912, p. 192.

Cappick, Marie, The Coral Tribune, Key West, Florida. August, 24, 1956, p. 5, Chapter XV, p. 4, 1957.

Gilfonds, M.E., Bernard De Witt, Eds. Key West in Transition, Key West Administration, WPA, December, 1934, p. 20.

Pratt, Dorothy and Richard, A Guide to Early American Homes South,
Bonanza Books, New York, 1956, p. 119.

3. Interviews:

Mr. Earl Johnson, Owner, 322 Duval Street, Key West, Florida.

Prepared by: Betty M. Bruce
Old Island Restoration
Foundation, Inc.
Project Historian
HABS Key West Project
November 1966

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Typical Island housing style known as a conch cottage scaled to the 5 1/2' stature, with three large disproportioned front facade dormers.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: 40' x 45'; five bays; one and one-half story; rectangular.
2. Foundations: Quarried lime rock and brick piers, interstices filled with wooden slats.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Lapped cedar siding, weathered.
4. Structural system: Wood frame.
5. Original plan and construction: A one-and-a-half story frame house with a full one-story veranda across the facade and the rear, and three front gabled dormers. The balustrade had a molded hand rail and turned balusters. The central dormer was double; each end dormer was single.
6. Alterations and additions: Part of the porch was enclosed and a bay added to the side to form an office for Captain Watlington. A small outside porch provided a private entrance to the office from the street. Later the remaining part of the rear porch was enclosed. A second porch, enclosed with screens, was added later.

The southernmost dormer on the facade was enlarged, giving the dormers their present disproportionate appearance. The turned balustrade on the front veranda was replaced by simple crossed supporting boards.

7. Porches: Front veranda extending full length of front facade, square posts, composite capitals, molded wood hand rail, simple crossed supports.
8. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Simple paneled doors with double-leaved shutters.
 - b. Windows and shutters: Double hung windows with double-leaved shutters.
9. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable,terne metal shingles.
 - b. Dormers: Three large disproportioned dormers conflicting with scale of front facade form the dominant feature.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:
 - a. First floor: Small central hall with all rooms entering thereon.
 - b. Attic: Half-story, similar.
2. Flooring: Wood, tongue and groove.
3. Wall and ceiling finish: Exposed siding, painted.
4. Doorways and doors: Large, rectangular doorway with sliding paneled doors between stair hall and main room. Other doorways have simple, paneled doors.
5. Hardware: Simple, period hardware, much of original retained.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces northeast on Duval Street. Building elevated on its piers. Large trees in rear.
2. Outbuildings: Utilitarian buildings including servants' quarters and kitchen. Wood frame kitchen has large brick chimney.

Prepared by: Charles E. McCoy, Jr.
Architect
Old Island Restoration
Foundation, Inc.
HABS Key West Project
November 1966

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared in 1967 during a summer project jointly sponsored by the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc. of Key West, and the Historic American Buildings Survey. Twenty-two structures were recorded, ranging from commercial structures, residences and hospitals to a convent, a lighthouse, and the Memorial to the Victims of the Disaster of the U.S. Battleship Maine.

The project was under the direction of F. Blair Reeves, AIA, Associated Professor, Department of Architecture, University of Florida. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects John D. Davenport and John F. Grimm of Texas A. and M. University, and John O. Crosby of the University of Florida. Mrs. Betty M. Bruce of the Old Island Restoration Foundation, Inc., and Professor Reeves were responsible for the historical and architectural data. They were assisted by members of the Foundation. J. Franks Brooks, Photographer, of Key West, supplied the photographs.